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HELPS IN LESSON PLANNING

Part One. Writing the Preliminary Data

ALL lesson plans made by student teachers consist of two parts, the explanation necessary for understanding the situation and the plan itself. This section deals specifically with the preliminary data, although it touches the *steps in the lesson* in discussing the choice of the teaching unit.

Use the given outline for the preliminary data unless your supervisor definitely asks you to modify it. If you use cards or paper cut to card size for your plans, all this data must go on the first card; condense until it will.

Outline for Part One. Preliminary Data

- I. Date
- II. Grade or section
- III. Time allowance
- IV. Major unit
- V. Minor teaching unit
- VI. Materials.

I. *Date*—Unless your supervisor requests it, do not date the plans to show when they are handed in; but it is most important that you indicate when you expect to begin teaching the lesson.

Ideally a lesson plan should not be made until the last related lesson has occurred; this is the only way to fit the plan exactly to the children's needs. But this does not allow enough time for the beginning student teacher, and the distance to our Training School is a factor that must be considered. Your supervisor will probably require you to hand in each plan two days before the teaching date; you should, however, revise your plans just before teaching them.

II. *Grade or Section*—When you teach only one grade or section, it is a waste of time to label your plans; simply omit Point II in the outline form. When you teach more than one group in the same subject, it is absolutely necessary that you specify which group the plan is for.

III. *Time Allowance*—How long a lesson will take depends upon the children's responses, and can never be quite accurately forecast; but an experienced teacher has a general idea of time limit which guides her in the selection and arrangement of materials. Try to forecast the time needed for each experience you plan; check yourself at the close to see what progress you are making in thus measuring the length of a lesson ahead of time.

IV. *Major Unit*—It is not possible to do good planning in piece-meal; you will be required to draft a preliminary plan for the whole piece of work before you begin making plans for parts of it. Sometimes this preliminary draft is simply a term outline; sometimes it is a *Harrisonburg Unit Plan*; sometimes it is a modified "contract unit"; sometimes it is a project, especially in the primary grades. But in every case this preliminary draft of the entire unit furnishes you with the topics and to a large extent the activities for the daily planning. It is hoped that requiring you to state the major unit as Point IV will focus your attention upon this; once you prove yourself capable of relating your smaller plans to the larger unit, your supervisor will probably ask you to omit Point IV. You should always indicate it in preparing a plan for publication, or for any one who is not familiar with the situation.

V. *Minor Teaching Unit*—The minor teaching unit is a statement of what you think the children will accomplish, a state-

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ment of the purpose of the experience planned, a purpose which can be shared with the children if not initiated by them. Consider the following sample teaching units for plans lasting from one to four days: (1) to make a pattern for the doll's winter coat, (2) to illustrate a poem, (3) to choose stories to read before another grade, (4) to list the five main ways in which birds help farmers, (5) to make a product map of Virginia, (6) to list class weaknesses in letter writing and to prepare practice material to fit, (7) to learn to distinguish a clause from a sentence, (8) to learn how to divide a decimal, (9) to master the use of subject forms after *than* in comparisons, and (10) to outline a program by which Valley farmers can increase the number of bushels of wheat per acre.

As stated in the discussion of Point IV, the large preliminary plan offers you topics for shorter experiences; each of the jobs listed forms such a minor teaching unit as does each problem set up. Study the following examples.

A preliminary plan for a second-grade reading club may list such jobs as electing officers, setting up standards for membership, outlining a program of work, choosing stories or poems to read to another class, practicing oral reading before entertaining the other class. Each of these jobs will form the topic for a smaller experience.

A fourth-grade unit on the Potomac River will probably contain such jobs as collecting pictures and clippings, making outline maps, making oral reports, studying a nearby stream; it will probably contain such problems as how the river affords pleasure to the people near it, how it furnishes food, how it helps trade, why it runs so slowly below Washington. Each of these jobs or problems is a topic for a plan.

A contract unit in sixth-grade reading might outline such jobs as matching assorted topics to a selection, making paragraph topics to fit a selection, skimming two or three articles for information on a topic,

mastering an important selection for detail, cutting a story for dramatization, reading stories or books for pleasure. Each of these jobs forms the basis of a plan.

Frequently the jobs or problems listed in the preliminary unit are too large for a beginner to work on. For instance, reading books or stories for pleasure would take at least two or three weeks, and the beginner needs more careful detailed planning. First outline the steps in the job, such as planning records for our reading, making the record cards, collecting books and stories, sharing what we read. This is as far as the experienced teacher or student teacher will go; the beginner must make a plan for each of the smaller jobs listed, such as making the record cards.

No matter how well made the large unit was, there must be constant modification. The class will suggest different jobs or problems requiring shifting of your plans. Moreover they will reveal unexpected weaknesses in needed skills—such as adding, measuring, applying water color, reading for main points, punctuating letters, executing a dance step, or making a French seam. Or they will show failure to master essential principles in a unit, such as the problems set up about the Potomac River. Do not look on this as a handicap; the best possible teaching is corrective, and it is a mark of skill on your part to be able to recognize such situations. Keep in mind always not only the jobs and problems listed in the large unit but more especially the needs of the class as revealed from day to day.

VI. *Materials*—You should exhaust the possibilities of materials. Get all the references that you or the children can use advantageously. Look around you for pictures, posters, maps, diagrams; if you cannot find usable ones, make them. Learn to use everything possible that is first hand; one main aim of the elementary school is to increase the child's understanding of his environment. Besides, such local material is of the utmost importance in interpreting the

remote things to the child; he must picture the unknown in terms of the concrete.

It is most essential that the art teacher have quantities of illustrative material, especially of children's work. Make yourself sets of posters to illustrate various art principles, label them carefully, and keep them for your own use. In the same way, make yourself sets of posters to teach language; one for titles, one for opening sentences, one for closing sentences, and on through the list of teaching units for your grade.

Plan to have the children participate in collecting material; they can share in the making of posters, diagrams, and maps for classroom use.

Plan ahead of time how you will use the material. It takes executive ability to get full use of it, but such material will so enrich your teaching that it is worth any effort required.

Part Two. Steps in the Lesson

"Steps" a Fundamental Principle—School experiences naturally fall into stages; they move forward in distinct phases of work. To outline a set list of steps and then try to fit all types of lessons to them would destroy the vitality of most school experiences. For the steps vary even with lessons of the same type, such as appreciation, problem-solving, construction, or practice for skill; to make a set outline for all appreciation lessons would cripple both you and the children. But to plan lessons in a haphazard way with no feeling for different stages in them cripples you almost as badly. The principle that lessons fall into distinct steps can be accepted as the basis of all planning; but there must be from three to five *informal* steps, not five *formal* ones.

The Nature of the "Steps"—The incidents in the lesson may be stated as things to be done. In a sixth-grade arithmetic lesson the steps might be (1) assignment of making original problems in percentage, (2) individual work on the problems, (3) class discussion of the problems, (4) sum-

mary of difficulties met by individuals and by the class, and (5) preparation of practice material to meet these difficulties. In an appreciation lesson the steps might be (1) creating a background for the new poem, (2) helping the children enjoy the new poem, (3) reading old poems related to the new one. In a composition lesson the steps might be (1) choosing the point and title for an individual paragraph story, (2) writing the story, (3) presenting the stories to the class, and (4) revising and copying the stories.

Problem-solving lessons may also be stated in terms of jobs to be accomplished. But since these jobs are really a set of problem-questions for solution, it is often easier to use the questions themselves as the steps. A lesson on *How the Potomac River Gives Us Food* is stated in terms of something to be done. The steps are (1) introducing the problem, (2) discussing food fish found in the Potomac, (3) finding out how each type of fish is caught. A lesson on *How the Typical Family Budget is Divided* has its steps in the form of problem-questions: (1) What are the important life interests to be provided for in the budget? (2) What part should each interest get? (3) How could we illustrate this on a chart? You should use whichever form seems most natural to you in the particular lesson you are planning.

The Assignment—If the experience is planned naturally as a whole and not in terms of separate class periods, the assignment is invariably one step in the plan. In fact the assignment is the very core of your planning; it should serve both as the guide for the children's preparation and for your follow-up classwork.

It is extremely wasteful for you to make an assignment which is not one step in the whole plan. As to which step it shall be, there is no set rule. Whenever guidance before individual work is needed, whenever you must teach or develop, whenever you must bring your class to a higher level of

work, there you need an assignment. In silent reading lessons custom makes it the second step, the introduction being the first one. In appreciation lessons it is almost always the last step, and is some sort of related work optional with the children. In drill lessons it may be the first step; but if the drill plan is made for a period longer than one recitation, you will probably need more than one assignment. You will teach, guide practice, test, reteach, guide practice, and so on; every time you need to teach or reteach, you need an assignment step. The only rule you can follow wisely is to put the assignment in whenever it is needed.

In problem-solving lessons it is often wise to make the assignment the basis of the whole plan instead of one step in it. You will make from three to five problem questions or jobs; these will be given to the children before the study period and will in turn serve as the lesson procedure for the next day. To avoid needless writing in such a plan you might use different colored ink for the part you would give the children, you might underline such parts, or you might state in a note to your supervisor that the main heads with Roman numerals will be given to the class. Underlining or using red ink has the advantage that you will probably want to give the class your minor questions in some cases; your supervisor will then understand that the minor questions or jobs not underlined are to help you in the follow-up work, and are not a part of the assignment. Learn to make plans which serve as an assignment, and also as teaching notes. Use your head to save yourself drudgery.

Arrangement on the Cards—The Preliminary Data all go on one card as specified in Part One. Where you have an abundance of material to note, you may need the back of this card; otherwise leave it vacant for notes of your own.

Each major step goes on one card. Use sentence outline form, either statements or questions. Be as terse as you can, but above

all things be definite. Keep your co-ordination correct, and your grammatical structure parallel. You really have no right to face the class with a lesson outline in poor form; check your work by the *Century Collegiate Handbook*, pp. 240-260, or by Anthony, *Technique in Organizing Large Units*.

Underneath each major step put the minor questions or steps needed to work it out. Never have more than five; three is preferable. You are generally expected to conform to your major points, but the minor ones are to be disregarded whenever a better procedure suggests itself. If you have too many minor points, you will not be so able to shift with the children's responses; you must travel light if you are to change trains quickly. The real teacher always gives the class a chance to set not only the minors but even the majors; you cannot begin with that, but you can plan so that you sense the essential points and are therefore free to omit non-essentials.

Limiting your minor questions or jobs causes you to condense and thus do better thinking. At the same time it makes it possible for you to read a card at a glance, thus causing your plans to serve as class notes.

Put the subject matter on the reverse of the cards in sentence outline; number it to correspond with the questions or steps; limit it to match them; if you have too much subject matter, condense and combine until you get only main problems. If you do not need subject matter for certain steps, simply omit it; do not write to fill up space.

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A man has lived to little purpose who has not learned that without general mental cultivation, no particular work that requires understanding can be done in the best manner. It requires brains to use practical experience; and brains, even without practical experience go farther than any amount of practical experience without brains.—*John Stuart Mill*.